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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **My employee moves at a snail's pace but is a good worker. I think I am seeing depression. I wish I could say that, but I know I can't. I have known this employee for 20 years. The employee should have more get-up-and-go. So how do I encourage an EAP referral?**

Are you witnessing behaviors and performance issues with your employee that can be described and measured? If so, schedule a discussion with your employee about correcting them. Don't try to figure out what underlies the behaviors. Describing and judging them as problematic to work performance is more meaningful to motivation and more important than a diagnostic label. Consider the following questions prior to your meeting:

- Have you grown accustomed to your employee's slow work pace over the years?
- Has some change or pattern recently emerged to cause you to focus upon them?
- Have they become more severe or more frequent?

Discuss with your employee the observations of slow performance, lack of drive, and appearance of being tired. Suggest that talking with an EA Professional may help resolve these issues. Notify the EAP of your referral, observations and job performance concerns.

■ **My employee complains to customers about co-workers and criticizes our services in front of them. Obviously this behavior is unacceptable and disloyal. I think we should dismiss the employee, because we can't expect the EAP to make someone loyal to the agency, can we?**

Although these inappropriate behaviors are unacceptable and demonstrate lack of loyalty, something else may be contributing to them. A supervisor referral would be a good move. Has your employee been loyal until only recently? Does he or she possess skills and abilities that you would like to keep if only unacceptable behavior changed? Your conclusion that the EAP can't make a difference may be an example of armchair diagnosis, which rules out the possibility of an underlying, treatable personal problem. There are many personal issues that could explain this behavior, such as anger, conflict at work, various emotional concerns, or problems that fuel the employee's willingness to act out. If any period of satisfactory performance existed in the past, then you've seen this employee's potential to return to at least that level of prior functioning. Use the EAP as a helpful productivity tool to see if you can get it back.

■ **What is the trickiest part of documentation—the part of the process most challenging for supervisors? How does a supervisor create documentation that does not become a piece of paper that simply represents the supervisor’s word over that of the employee’s?**

Documentation of employee performance is often difficult for a supervisor

who does not understand how to separate emotional reactions to the employee’s behavior. Instead of documenting specific, objective information, the supervisor unwittingly slips into making personal attacks or judgments about an employee’s character. Frequently, a supervisor will insist that his or her documentation is accurate and objective, even though it demonstrates the classic misstep of focusing on the employee’s psychological makeup. A powerful technique that is often omitted from supervisor documentation is providing concrete examples of what is being discussed, such as complaint letters, records showing proof of an employee’s lateness or examples of inaccuracies on reports. Decide how you will present your concerns to the employee. Listening to the employee’s perspective and response to your objective documentation can be powerful. State clearly your expectations and explore ways to help the employee succeed. If performance does not improve, and you feel more aggressive action needs to be taken, always consult with your manager or HR representative. Consultation with an EA professional at any stage of the process may provide additional insight and helpful suggestions.

■ **Can you provide some tips to help me be more positive and effective in evaluating my employees’ performance this year? What are some trouble spots that supervisors must be careful to avoid?**

The most overlooked benefit of a performance appraisal is its potential to

bring employees and supervisors closer together as partners in maximizing employee productivity. Remember to view performance appraisal as a way to help employees improve—not as something punitive. Performance evaluation meetings are a two-way street. Employees should never be surprised by your areas of concern. Ambushing an employee with previously unknown complaints about performance creates distrust. Always end meetings by providing instructions on how your employee can improve. Be sure the employee understands your expectations. Focus on successes as well as shortcomings. Praise and thank individuals for tasks they have performed well during the year. Be specific! For example, when you praise an employee, you might say, “You did an excellent job arranging that all-staff meeting. I feel as if I can always count on you to take care of details like keeping staff informed.”

■ **I had a good conversation with the EAP about my employee’s performance issues prior to making a referral. I then forgot to advise the EAP of the referral. I think the employee went but didn’t cooperate with the EAP. Is it my fault the employee didn’t cooperate? Can I refer again?**

It’s important to notify the EAP when you’ve made a referral. Without that notice the EAP cannot confirm an employee’s contact. Whether or not the employee made an EAP appointment, your focus must remain on job performance. It is not your fault if an employee does not cooperate with EAP suggestions and referrals. Sometimes supervisors avoid following through with appropriate actions because an employee met with the EAP. When this happens, employees can minimize the severity of performance issues and avoid making needed changes. Other times, supervisors see immediate improvements in an employee’s performance. This improvement may be a genuine attempt to improve or a short-term period of improvement prompted by a sense of urgency from the experience of being referred to the EAP. Yes, you may refer again if problems persist or return. Remember, always notify the EAP about the referral as well as relevant performance information.